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COUNTRY	USSR (Kazakh SSR)	REPORT	[REDACTED]	25X1
SUBJECT	Construction Activities and Conditions at "Location X" near Semipalatinsk	DATE DISTR.	4 October 1955	
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DATE ACQUIRED		This is UNEVALUATED Information		

**SOURCE EVALUATIONS ARE DEFINITIVE. APPRAISAL OF CONTENT IS TENTATIVE.**

1. In fall 1947, [ ] a unit of other Armenian recruits, was put aboard a troop train at Leninakan. The train proceeded through the Caucasus, across the Volga, down into Central Asia, to Semipalatinsk, passing through Navtlugi, Baku, Derbent, Chkalov, Dzhambul, and Alma-Ata. It is not clear at what point the train crossed the Volga; [ ] the train did not pass through Stalingrad, [ ] At the various stops, other units of recruits joined the train; for instance, at Navtlugi, Georgian recruits were put aboard. The recruits were still in their civilian clothes and had received no military training. In each car with them was a lieutenant and a sergeant, both of whom were armed.
2. On arrival at Semipalatinsk, at about 6:00 pm [ ] [ ] the recruits were passed over to some local troops and spent the night in an area which was near the military hospital, in the main (north-bank) section of Semipalatinsk. There was no regular accommodation in the area; many of the recruits slept the night in the open.

STATE	X	ARMY	X	NAVY	X	AIR	X	FBI		AEC		OST	E	X		
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(Note: Washington distribution indicated by "X"; Field distribution by "#")

[REDACTED]

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3. [REDACTED] The recruits were given a meal in the morning, taken to a bath-house, and at approximately 9:00 pm put on board a river steamer. [REDACTED]

25X1

25X1

[REDACTED] the captain and crew were civilians. [REDACTED] there were no passengers other than the recruits. During the night, while the steamer was under way, the troops saw nothing of the country or the river banks, and no stops were made [REDACTED]

25X1

4. At approximately 8:00-8:30 the following morning, the steamer arrived at a location known [REDACTED] as Avtobat (Avto Batalon), where a military transport unit was stationed. Without roll-calling or other delays, the troops were put in Studebaker-type military trucks, approximately 30 to 35 men per truck, and driven straight inland on a road at right angles to the river. A short time after leaving the river, the road returned to the right (sic). The sun was behind them when they started; then it rained for an hour and a half, after which the sun was on the left. The road was rough and went over the desert, but the convoy traveled fairly fast (sic), slowing down occasionally when the road was rutted. The ruts and the absence of dust indicated that the road was in fairly frequent use. Occasionally, other roads joined the one on which the convoy travelled, but no rivers, lakes, hills, or other landmarks were recalled. The ground was flat so that one could have driven over it in any direction, and the only objects [REDACTED] were occasional rough dwellings made of mud. There were no people in them, and the troops said that the inhabitants had been cleared out of the whole area before the military operations started. The trucks passed through no barbed wire fences.

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5. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the driving time between Avtobat and the site was five hours. The site was a flat plain, so flat that the sun seemed to rise straight from the earth in the morning and to sink down into the earth at night. The only distinctive feature to be seen was some low hills to the southwest; there were no houses, and no lights were observed at night. Vegetation consisted of grass growing up to 1.8 m high and some low shrubs, approximately .6 - .8 m, which were used for fuel. Animal life was lacking, and the whole area was remarkable chiefly for its desolation; "no women, no birds, no mice".

#### Military Organization at "Location X"

6. The first few days were spent in tents until the troops had put up some barracks, which were rough structures of timber and metal sheet, sunk a little into the ground. The group of troops [REDACTED] became known as the 52nd Separate Military Construction Battalion (Otdelnyy Voenno-Stroitelnyy Batalon - OVSB). The barracks constructed were one large barracks containing the major part of the battalion, store, officers' barracks, cook-house, store for picks and shovels, and one barracks for the servicing or auxiliary platoon (khoz'vzvod).

25X1

7. The 52nd Battalion was divided into three sections, variously described [REDACTED] as companies (vzvody) and platoons (rota) (sic), each containing 50 to 65 men and one servicing or auxiliary platoon. [REDACTED] on the breakdown of the battalion, [REDACTED] the battalion comprised three companies, with three platoons in each company, and three squads (otdeleniye) in each platoon. The whole battalion included almost three hundred men, including officers and enlisted men. Following are the names of some officers and enlisted men in the battalion:

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[REDACTED]

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S-E-C-R-E-T

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Major Zyuzin (fnu): Commanding officer of the battalion

Captain Oganessov (or Oganessyan) (fnu): An Armenian

Captain Karabkevich (fnu): In command of the Third Platoon

Sergeant Chernenkiy (fnu)

First Sergeant Kovshannikov (fnu)

Stepa Sarkisyan: Soldier

Zenik Stepanyan: Soldier

Norik Stepanyan: Soldier

Senior Sergeant Ovsyannikov (fnu)

8. Other military formations at the site were:

- a. The 52nd Separate Military Construction Regiment (polk) (OVSP), located about a 45-minute walk to the right of the 52nd Br "right" apparently meaning "south".

25X1

25X1

The regiment was approximately four times larger than the battalion. It was under the command of an Armenian lieutenant colonel who, [redacted] was the real head of the whole site, in spite of the fact that the 53rd Regiment (see b. below) was in the charge of a colonel. The lieutenant colonel was said to be an engineer and appeared throughout the site, inspecting, instructing, and deciding technical points. He had guarded quarters at the back (west side) of his regiment, was always accompanied by an adjutant, and was privileged to have his wife and daughter with him.

25X1

- b. The 53rd Separate Military Construction Battalion; located approximately an hour's walk to the left of the 52nd Battalion.

- c. The 53rd Separate Military Construction Regiment; located beyond the 53rd Battalion in the same direction.

[redacted] the 53rd Battalion or 53rd Regiment [redacted]

25X1

The soldiers were Moldavians and Russians, and they were engaged on the same work as the 52nd Battalion. [redacted] the total number of men engaged on building at the site at approximately 5,000.

25X1

9.

25X1

[redacted] The officers wore black shoulder boards with crossed picks and shovels, which indicated that they were construction troops. The only other insignia seen regularly at the site were wheels, worn on the shoulders of the truck drivers. No other recruits were added to [redacted] battalion once it was established at the construction site; but occasionally a sergeant was replaced.

25X1

25X1

10. Approximately two weeks after arrival at the site, the recruits were issued uniforms and, a little later, took an oath to serve faithfully. Some days after this (possibly November 1947), the soldiers were assembled and brought one by one before a commission of officers, which included the lieutenant colonel and the major. Each man had to sign a slip of paper promising not to speak of his work at the building site and dropped the paper in a box ("like a Soviet election"). No regular military training was given at any time, nor were the soldiers issued any arms. Their equipment consisted of picks and shovels.

S-E-C-R-E-T

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S-E-C-R-E-T

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Postal Address

11. The soldiers were first told that their mailing address was:

"Kazakhskaya SSR, Polevaya Pochta 62"

and later that it was:

"Kazakhskaya SSR, Gorod Semipalatinsk, Polevaya Pochta 62 Zh. rota ---, vzvod ---".

They were also warned not to say anything in their letters of the work on which they were engaged, and the soldiers believed that mail was censored.

Construction Activities

12. Once the barracks had been put up, the actual construction operation began, which consisted of digging a series of pits (yama). Each of the four units dug in all directions around its living quarters, although there were few or no pits "to the front" (ie, east) of the 53rd Battalion and 53rd Regiment. [redacted] no reason or system for the pits; they were just very numerous, more than 100, and scattered widely over the landscape. They were of varying sizes. The small ones were approximately two m by three m and just deep enough so that a man standing in the pit could not see over the top. Other pits were five, six, or ten m long and so deep that they had to be dug out in three steps. The men at the bottom threw the dirt up onto the first step; from here it was thrown to the second step, from the second to the third; and the man on the third step would throw the earth up onto the surface. The sides of the larger pits sloped inward, so that the roof area was greater than the floor area.
13. All digging was done by hand, without any mechanical aids. It took one week to dig one of the smaller pits. The top layer of soil was a thin layer of black soil approximately three or four fingers deep; next, there was a layer of sand, perhaps knee-deep; and below that there was a reddish clay-like stratum which could not be dug in winter before it had been broken up with a crowbar; at some pits the stratum was yellow.
14. After a pit was dug, posts (stolb) were put in to form a wall, but a space of 20 cm was left between the posts and the earth sides of the pit. Prepared concrete was then brought up on a truck and poured between the posts and the pit side and also onto the pit floor to a depth of 25 cm. [redacted] concrete poured straight onto the earth floors and then levelled out by the soldiers; [redacted] between the posts and the earth sides. [redacted] iron mesh (reshetka) being inserted in the walls of the larger pits, [redacted] "The pits were completed by laying a roof of other posts across the top, the wall posts being shaped to receive them. Earth was piled on top of the roof to the level of the surface of the ground, and the pit was ready. The earth removed from the pits was roughly dispersed but was not carried away, and no effort was made to conceal it. The distance between the top of the roof beams and the ground ranged from a few inches to one m for the biggest pits.
15. [redacted] the pits contained no steel plates, girders, pipes, lavatories, air vents (other than the entrances), internal subdivisions, or doors. [redacted] concrete poured without any provision having been made for the laying of pipes. The additional features of the pits were the tunnels and entrances.

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S-E-C-R-E-T

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S-E-C-R-E-T

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25X1

-5-

16. Tunnels were built joining some of the pits to each other. These tunnels were always dug out from below, without disturbing the surface of the ground. The walls consisted of intermittent posts, to the back and front of which planks (doska) were secured. The roofs were also made of planks. The distance between the top of the tunnels and the ground might have been two m. In the case of shallow pits which were joined by tunnels, it was necessary to dig steps downwards from the pit into the tunnel. The tunnels were just large enough for one man to walk along in them upright. The entrances to the pits were made by digging rough earth steps upwards. The steps would lead straight onto the ground; there were no doors or other fittings. Some pits had no walls and no entrances.

17. [redacted] the pits [redacted] were "various" shapes. Some of the smallest pits had simply earth walls and no posts. In some cases, a large pit was surrounded by a group of small ones, joined to it by tunnels. [redacted]

25X1  
25X1  
25X1

18. [redacted]

25X1

19. After the digging and the concreting had been done, the job of the ordinary soldiers was finished. Everyone had been asked about his qualification, however, and a number of soldiers had then been detailed to form a special platoon. One man, Morozov (fnu), [redacted] an assembler (monter) had been sent to this platoon. The special platoon worked at the pits once they were ready and worked with cable drums.

25X1

[redacted] The cable drums with which the "special platoon" worked were considerably higher, approximately 2.4 m, and the cable was about twice as thick and sheathed in a conspicuously white and shiny metal, possibly aluminum. Inside the special platoon's cable, there were numerous multi-coloured strands.

25X1

25X1

20. One evening, at an hour when the soldiers were normally attending political lectures, MGB troops drove up to a completed pit in a truck and busied themselves inside it. [redacted] this happened often and [redacted] the time was specially chosen so that the troops would not know what was being done.

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25X1

21. [redacted]

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S-E-C-R-E-T

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S-E-C-R-E-T

25X1

25X1

-6-

Living Conditions at the Construction Site

22. The conditions at the construction site were extremely hard. Besides the general desolation of the area, the labor was exhausting and was done on a piece-work basis, and food was insufficient. The morale of the troops was low, and there were desertions, self-woundings, and thefts from comrades. There was a bakery at the construction site, which employed 20 to 40 men and served all the construction units. There were two large brick ovens and two of iron, the latter turning out approximately 120 loaves at a time. Work was carried on on a 24-hour basis, in shifts.

Road between "Location X" and Avtobat

23. Along the road between the construction site and Avtobat, but at a point nearer to Avtobat, there was a large barbed wire entanglement, breast high, running across country. There were MGB troops here, who had blue bands around their caps, edged with red, and blue shoulder boards also edged with red. Some of the soldiers had dogs with them, and watchtowers were spaced along the wire. The MGB conducted a 45-minute examination of the truck [redacted] and its passengers before allowing them to proceed.

25X1

[redacted] The road did not run alongside the wire for any distance but merely through it. [redacted]

Avtobat

24. The motor-transport unit at Avtobat contained many drivers and trucks (sic) and was located on the bank of the Irtysh; adjoining it, downstream, were some barracks. Still further downstream, and some way in from the bank, was some further construction activity. Georgian troops were building with brick. [redacted] they looked somewhat like living quarters. Upstream, about 10 - 15 minutes' walk away and a short distance from the bank, there was a military hospital with four wards, one of which was known to contain 30 patients.
25. There was a bakery at Avtobat, which was larger than the one at the construction site. Approximately 100 men worked in it. The bakery supplied bread to the MGB, the hospital, the transport unit, and the Georgian construction unit. [redacted]
26. There were mud dwellings at Avtobat but no regular settlement.
27. The embankment on the opposite side of the river bore no resemblance to a railroad embankment. It looked merely like a heap of earth that might have been thrown up by digging operations and was the size of a small two-story house.

25X1

25X1

Road between Avtobat and Semipalatinsk

28. A road ran along the south bank of the Irtysh, between Avtobat and Semipalatinsk. For the first ten km out of Avtobat, the road was of gravel (shcheben); thereafter, it was the same sort of rough desert road as ran from Avtobat to the building site, rutted but not dusty. A little way out from Avtobat, there was a check-point where soldiers stopped trucks to examine papers. However, this check-up was of a much less stringent nature and there was no barbed wire to be seen. Once past the check-point, people were to be seen in the little villages along the road. Hills, lower than those at the building site, were to be seen on the right as one drove into Semipalatinsk. At a crude settlement on the south bank of the Irtysh, opposite Semipalatinsk, the trucks were ferried over to Semipalatinsk itself on a barge.<sup>2</sup> There was also a public ferry.

S-E-C-R-E-T

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S-E-C-R-E-T

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25X1

-7-

29. Following are the lengths of time [ ] between  
Avtobat and Semipalatinsk [ ]

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25X1

25X1

a. Trip No. 1: Left Avtobat 9-10 am (8-9 am). Short stops along the way.  
Arrived south bank opposite Semipalatinsk 7 pm (6:30-7 pm).

b. Trip No. 2: Left Semipalatinsk just after noon meal [ ]  
Breakdown along the way lasting 30 to 45 minutes. Arrived Avtobat after  
dark, 7-8 pm ( the lights were on, 9:30-10 pm).

25X1

c. Trip No. 3: Left Avtobat around noon. Arrived south bank opposite  
Semipalatinsk shortly after dark.

30.

25X1

31.

### Semipalatinsk

32. There was a large military hospital at Semipalatinsk [ ]  
[ ] Many of the patients were from the construction site, their  
illness attributed to the hard conditions. There were numerous troops in  
the town [ ] in 1948, including a cavalry unit which was  
drilling, slashing at stakes in the ground with their sabers. The Voenkomat  
was a large two-story building in the main town, not far from the railroad  
station.

25X1

25X1

25X1

### Comments

25X1

1.

25X1

2. The settlement is presumably Zhana Semey (N 50-25, E 80-12).

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25X1

S-E-C-R-E-T

25X1  
25X1

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Legend to Sketch of Location X: See page 10 .

1. The 52nd Battalion.
2. Cookhouse of the battalion: Each of the four construction units had its own cookhouse.
3. Guardhouse.
4. Bakery: Served whole construction site; [redacted] Ten-15 minutes' walking distance from the 52nd Battalion. 25X1
5. Five or six diesels. Power supplied by the diesels provided electric lighting to the site. No machines driven by electricity known. [redacted] the special platoon had no connection with the operation of the diesels, or with the lighting for the camps. The diesels stood in the open in summer and were tented over in winter. 25X1  
25X1
6. The 52nd Regiment: CO's quarters shown as large square at rear. About 45 minutes' walk from the 52nd Battalion.
7. The 53rd Battalion: About one hour's walk from the 52nd Battalion. In the area of the 53rd Battalion was a hole in the ground (unknown whether artificial or natural) from which drinking water was taken. It was necessary to bend down and scoop the water out of the hole with a bucket held in the hand. The buckets were emptied into containers which were then carried off by trucks or horses. A small number of horses, the only ones seen at the site, were kept for this purpose. [redacted] 25X1  
25X1
8. The 53rd Regiment: Located beyond the 53rd Battalion in the same direction but at an indeterminate distance.
9. Preparation of concrete at this point: A narrow-gauge railroad, which was believed to be new and which was equipped with a small locomotive and twenty dump cars, brought sand and a firm yellowish rock from a point about half a mile away in the hills. Cement was said to be brought from Semipalatinsk. Numerous machines at this point included a diesel, stone-crushing machines, and concrete mixers. [redacted] trucks driving up in a double line and being filled up with concrete by machines standing both to the right and left of the road. There were at least 100 men working here, who lived on the spot in tents; work was done at night. The trucks carried the concrete directly to the site. [redacted] 25X1  
25X1  
[redacted] The trucks were Studebakers; [redacted] only one ZIS vehicle on the site; all the others were American. The distance between the concrete mixing point and the 52nd Battalion was about an hour's walk; the first pit was about ten minutes' walk away.
10. Narrow-gauge railroad: About 1.3 km long, from concrete-mixing machines to a point in the hills.
11. A line of low hills: Under 20.4 m; lying to the southwest of the 52nd Battalion. No particularly high or distinctive hills remembered.
12. A small lake and stream situated within the hills: The soldiers were taken here to bathe. The lake was about 10 - 15 minutes from the concrete-mixing point. No barbed wire fences or other distinctive features were passed on the way.

S-E-C-R-E-T

25X1



S-E-C-R-E-T

25X1  
25X1

-9-

13. A large pit: In front of the bakery.
14. Another large pit.
15. A medium-sized pit joined by a tunnel to another pit.
16. The unshaded oblongs and squares represent other pits. Their number and relative position and the double pit marked (a) are uncertain.
17. The dotted lines are roads.

18. Trench (kanava): About January 1948, [ ] the trench, which was narrow, about knee-high, and ran in a straight line in the same direction as the road to Avtobat. A mechanical shovel was used to aid in the digging. [ ]

25X1

[ ] The trench looked as though it was meant for the laying of a pipe, [ ]

25X1

[ ] The trench ran, in the direction of Avtobat, [ ]

19. Road to Avtobat.

20. Possible boring operation: Six men worked at this point, turning a T-shaped instrument around and around by hand. Weights were suspended from the tips of the T "to make the instrument heavier"; the point ran into the ground. [ ]

25X1

21. Sunrise in this direction.

S-E-C-R-E-T

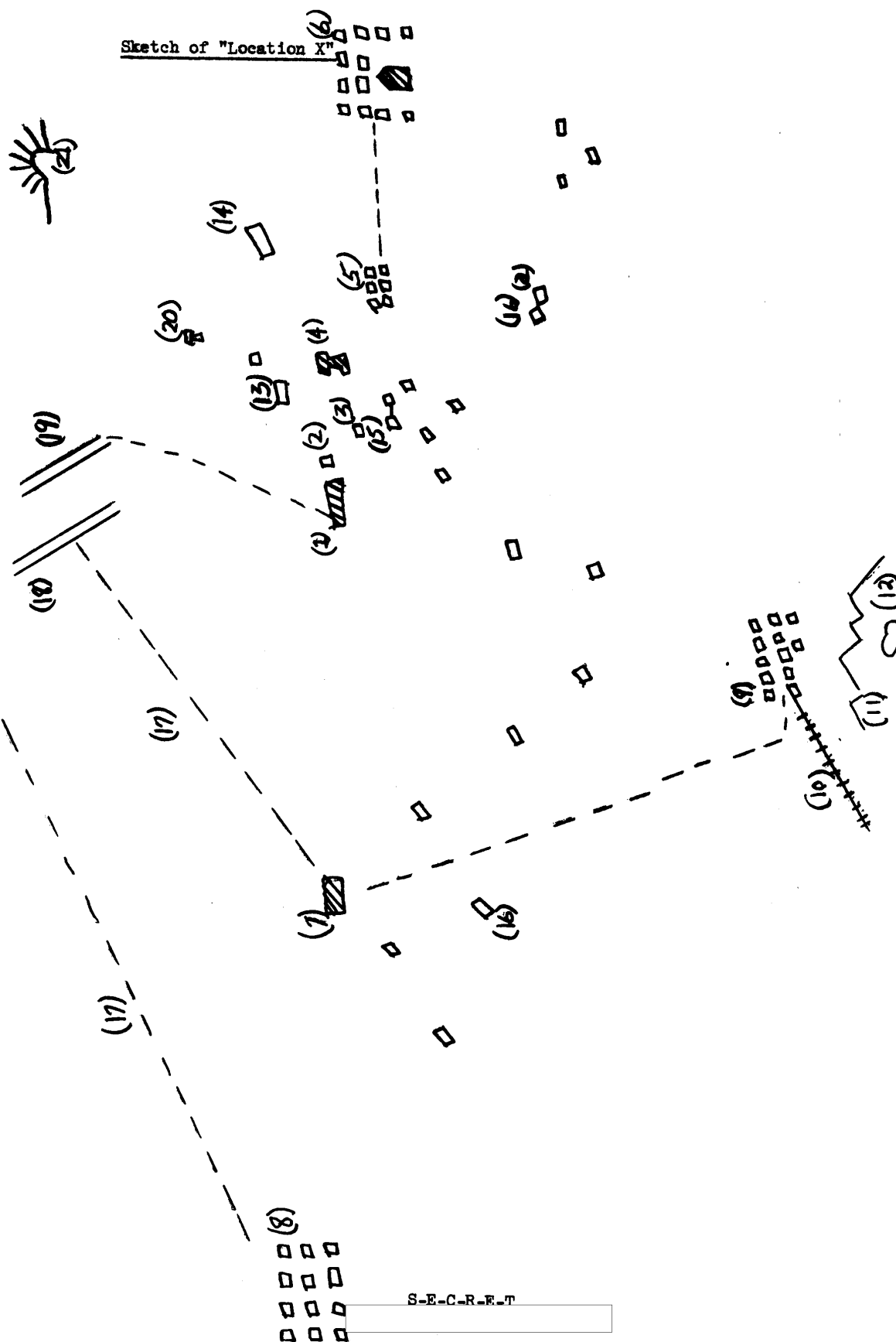
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S-E-C-R-E-T

25X1  
25X1

-10-

Sketch of "Location X"



S-E-C-R-E-T

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